

Washington, D.C. - Recently back from a week-long fact finding mission to survey damage from last month's devastating tsunami and earthquake in Southeast Asia, Congressman Earl Blumenauer (D-Ore.) testified before the House International Relations Committee on Capitol Hill today to report on the findings of his trip.

"While the magnitude of the ruin is difficult to capture in words the images that will remain with me forever are those that speak of the deep personal loss experienced by children, families and villages," said Blumenauer in his opening remarks.

Blumenauer's testimony began with a report on initial recovery efforts. He praised relief efforts by non-profit organizations and the contribution of the U.S. military, as well as the efforts of local citizens who are already rebuilding schools and key infrastructure just a few weeks after the disaster. Blumenauer also focused on the next steps the United States and the international community must take in response to this crisis.

"Now, the immediate challenge is to make the transition from relief to recovery," said Blumenauer. "The United States must work alongside the affected communities and our global partners to use this moment to make the world a better and safer place. We all benefit by taking positive steps that provide badly needed relief, followed by long term measures that improve and sustain communities and economies, and policies that provide greater protection from future events and strengthen global cooperation."

"First, the United States has an obligation to follow through on the promise of aid and make a long-term commitment to the recovery of the region. Sadly, the record in the aftermath of other disasters is not encouraging. The United States should take the lead in making sure that pledges materialize, and in exerting leadership in the world community, so that generosity is more than a media buzz word and actually helps the hundreds of thousands of people who so desperately need it now.

"We also have a moral obligation to do better than just putting people back in harm's way. While we cannot prevent natural events such as floods, mudslides, volcanic eruptions, wildfires, earthquakes, or tsunamis, we can reduce or mitigate their devastating impacts by helping communities to rebuild in safer locations, construct sturdier dwellings, and enforce sound building practices."

Blumenauer also pointed to the opportunity to use the recovery efforts as a way to promote

peace and stability in some of the traditionally high conflict areas such as Sri Lanka and Banda Aceh and to forge a closer relationship with countries like India.

In closing, Blumenauer urged the committee to remember the United States' obligation to the rest of the world and not to let efforts in Southeast Asia negatively impact humanitarian efforts in other critical parts of the world including Darfur, Sudan.